United Nations A/C.4/60/SR.21

General Assembly
Sixtieth session

Official Records

Distr.: General
17 November 2005

Original: English

Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee)

Summary record of the 21st meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Wednesday, 2 November 2005, at 2.30 p.m.

Chairman: Mr. Aliyev (Azerbaijan)

Contents

Agenda item 30: United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (*continued*)

This record is subject to correction. Corrections should be sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned *within one week of the date of publication* to the Chief of the Official Records Editing Section, room DC2-750, 2 United Nations Plaza, and incorporated in a copy of the record.

Corrections will be issued after the end of the session, in a separate corrigendum for each Committee.

05-58349 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 2.40 p.m.

Agenda item 30: United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (*continued*) (A/60/13 and Add.1, A/60/212, A/60/256, A/60/277 and A/60/439)

1. **Mr. Gidor** (Israel) said that it was in the interests of all, in particular the donors to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) that the Agency should maintain neutrality and impartiality. His Government was disappointed that the Agency's report failed to mention the context in which UNRWA activities were carried out, namely Israel's perennial need to protect its citizens from terrorist attacks. During the current round of its war on terrorism, which had begun in October 2000, over 1,000 Israeli citizens had been killed. During the period covered by the report Israel had endured some 2,000 separate incidents of terrorism. That situation had been described by UNRWA as one of severe strife, whereas in reality his country had been subjected to a savage onslaught that had necessitated a military response. By omitting the context, the report failed to present the relevant relationship between cause and effect.

2. Since 1967, his Government had undertaken to facilitate the task of the Agency, subject only to regulations or arrangements necessitated by military security. Limitations had to be placed occasionally on the movement of goods and individuals in order to prevent infiltration and security infringements. That circumstance, too, had been omitted from the report.

3. Israel supported the humanitarian mandate of UNRWA, and continued to attach great significance to its activities. The Agency's dialogue with the Israeli authorities had improved and he welcomed its more constructive approach to Israel's concerns. At every level, Israeli officials were available to meet and cooperate with their counterparts on issues related to UNRWA operations. His Government had daily arranged for UNRWA vehicles, goods and personnel to travel through border crossings, despite repeated attacks directed against Israeli personnel working at the crossings.

4. Palestinian terrorist organizations were determined to sabotage any progress towards peace in the region. Hamas had abandoned any restraint, and had directly caused the deaths of many Palestinians, both by launching attacks from densely populated areas thus exposing them to counter-attack, as in the case of an UNRWA school, and by keeping dangerous munitions in civilian areas. UNRWA must ensure that its installations were not used for such purposes. The Palestinian leadership had failed to react in any way to those problems.

5. Assistance to the Palestinian people was an important part of his Government's policy, as economic growth and the improved welfare of the Palestinian population was integral to the stability of the region. Both the Palestinian and the Israeli people had the right to self-determination, and deserved to live in security and peace. The suffering of both peoples was a humanitarian issue. Israel hoped that its neighbours would enjoy adequate living conditions. The Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip had provided the Palestinians with an opportunity to build a better future for themselves.

6. **Mr. Kader Mohideen** (India) said that his delegation shared the international community's concern over the endless cycle of violence and counter-violence that characterized the current phase of the conflict in the Middle East. The economies of both Israel and the Palestinian Authority had suffered. In Palestine, increased poverty and unemployment, coupled with the decreasing revenues of the Palestinian Authority, had brought the economy to the verge of collapse. The construction of the separation wall by Israel in the territory, including in and around East Jerusalem, had exacerbated a deteriorating humanitarian situation. The international community was most concerned about the wall's encroachment on Palestinian land and interests and the great hardships created for the people affected by its construction. Furthermore, there was a danger that continued construction of the wall might prejudge the outcome of the final status negotiations between the parties.

7. India had called for the easing of the restrictions placed on the Palestinian areas and for action to defuse the mounting humanitarian crisis. In the past, it had manifested its support for the Palestinian people in their quest for nationhood through regular assistance and the supply of medicines to the Palestinian Authority. It had also made a regular, albeit modest, contribution to the UNRWA budget and in 2004 had doubled its contribution to the Agency's regular budget. The restrictions placed on the movement of UNRWA staff and the resulting limitations on the

Agency's ability to deliver humanitarian assistance were both matters for concern. Blockades should be lifted and the delivery of humanitarian supplies should not be hindered.

8. There were currently over 4 million Palestinian refugees in the region. Their primary source of humanitarian relief was UNRWA. In addition to the Agency's crucial role in addressing the humanitarian crisis, its activities were an important component in the struggle to achieve peace in the Middle East. It was imperative that the international community should continue to carry out its shared responsibility to support the Agency, and that the Quartet should work closely with the parties to encourage them to fulfil their obligations. All sides must work together to achieve the vision of two States living side by side within secure and recognized borders.

9. **Mr. Yamamoto** (Japan) said that his Government recognized that an opportunity currently existed to advance the Middle East process, and it had become actively engaged in that undertaking. Following the election of Mr. Mahmoud Abbas as President of the Palestinian Authority, his Government had extended an invitation to both Prime Minister Sharon and President Abbas, in an effort to build a bridge between the parties. Mr. Abbas had travelled to Japan in May and met the Prime Minister, who had expressed support for President Abbas's efforts for peace, and requested that he continue to take steps to control the extremists. On the same occasion, his Government had announced its intention to contribute an additional sum of approximately $100 million, half of which had already been provided to UNRWA and other United Nations organizations for emergency assistance.

10. Since 1993, Japan had contributed $500 million to the Palestinians through UNRWA. Its total assistance to the Palestinians since 1993 amounted to $760 million, approximately 10 per cent of which had been channelled through UNRWA. When the United Nations had launched its Consolidated Appeal Process for the occupied Palestinian territory in November 2004, his Government had decided to provide additional assistance of $60 million, of which one quarter was to be delivered through UNRWA. The aim was to support rehousing and the creation of employment in the Gaza Strip.

11. Japan was making contributions in the areas of education and vocational training in order to encourage self-reliance in the refugees and reinvigorate the economy, side by side with UNRWA capacity-building. His Government considered that assistance important from the human security perspective, which focused on protection and empowerment.

12. UNRWA continued to play a vital role in the region. As one of the major donors, Japan paid closer attention to the Agency's management of its budget and operations, and expected it to achieve transparency in its administration and to use its resources efficiently.

13. **Mr. Islam** (Bangladesh) observed that, in view of the disturbing behaviour of the Israeli authorities and the vital contribution UNRWA was making to the survival of the Palestinian refugees in the occupied territories, the failure of the international community to remedy the Agency's severe underfunding was a matter of concern. Indeed, the UNRWA medium-term plan would require considerable additional extrabudgetary funding, because of the deepening humanitarian crisis and the depressed Palestinian economy. The international community must come to its assistance.

14. As the birthplace of microcredit, Bangladesh commended the Agency for the income-generating activities it had initiated, even in an economic climate of decline, under its microfinance and microenterprise programme. UNRWA had also done well to follow up on the 2004 Geneva conference and to begin implementing its recommendations. The Palestine Refugee Records Project should enable the needs of the refugees to be assessed more accurately, and the Agency's medium-term plan should help to identify priorities and chart long-term strategies, while its internal reforms should improve management practices.

15. His delegation urged the United Nations to make hazardous-duty payments to the thousands of UNRWA local staff, who were the only staff members in such a dangerous situation not receiving those payments.

16. The Commissioner-General and her entire staff were to be commended for their unwavering dedication and hard work in the face of continued adversity.

17. **Mr. Erçin** (Turkey) said that Turkey had welcomed Israel's unilateral disengagement from the Gaza Strip and parts of the West Bank as a significant step towards a comprehensive settlement of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Both parties should take advantage of the momentum thus created by doing

their part to achieve the two-State solution envisioned under the Quartet Road Map.

19. The situation remained fragile, however. Turkey unequivocally condemned in the strongest terms all acts of terrorism — such as the one that had claimed innocent lives in Israel the previous week — as well as any provocation and incitement to violence. It was equally critical of improper and harsh retaliatory measures. The region must not be allowed to fall victim to violence, misery and desperation once again at the current critical juncture. Both parties must act with the utmost restraint.

20. As the largest United Nations relief and human development agency in the region, UNRWA had been given the task of dealing with one of the most difficult aspects of the Middle East question: the over 4 million Palestinian refugees dispersed throughout the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, as well as in Jordan, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic, for whom it was a lifeline. It was a tremendous undertaking to address their multifaceted needs.

21. The dire economic conditions that persisted, particularly in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, owing to Israeli closures and other restrictive measures, impeded not only the daily lives of the refugees but also the activities of the Agency, whose services needed to be provided on a steady basis. Security measures by Israel should in no way hinder access to humanitarian assistance. The Agency's efforts to coordinate activities with the Special Envoy for Disengagement of the Quartet should facilitate matters, but key issues pertaining to the Gaza Strip had yet to be settled by Israel with the parties involved.

22. The ongoing reform process within UNRWA aimed at devising new operational approaches was commendable. His delegation endorsed the recommendations in the report of the Working Group on the Financing of UNRWA (A/60/439), and supported the proposed expansion of the Agency's Advisory Commission to include the leading donors.

23. **Mr. Al-Zayani** (Bahrain) said that the ongoing humanitarian crisis in the occupied Palestinian territories had undoubtedly escalated as a result of the curfews, closures and other military operations carried out by the Israeli forces, which had also hampered the Agency's ability to perform its humanitarian work in support of Palestinian refugees. The separation wall in the West Bank, which had been deemed illegitimate in the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice, was causing similarly adverse repercussions, having created new obstacles to the delivery of essential UNRWA services to Palestinian refugee families, in particular those living between the wall and the Green Line. The Agency's humanitarian work was also further impeded by the punitive operations that had been imposed, which were inconsistent with international law and the agreements between UNRWA and the Government of Israel.

24. As indicated in the report of the Working Group on the Financing of UNRWA (A/60/439), the funding gap for the Agency's regular budget had declined owing to a combination of exchange rate gains and increased contributions to some donors. The Agency had also successfully adopted innovative approaches towards overcoming the structural deficit in its budget. Bearing in mind that economic hardship and high unemployment rates remained a major problem in both Gaza and the West Bank, he expressed the hope that the Agency's 2005-2009 medium-term plan would enhance the economic potential of the refugees and address the unmet needs of the most vulnerable among them, in particular. He also hoped that the Agency would successfully attract more funding, especially from major donors, in order to address the financial situation and thereby improve the living conditions of the Palestinian refugees through its programme activities. The problem of the refugees was rooted in the political issue of the creation of Palestine. Israel's failure to implement Security Council resolution 194 (III) had not only contributed to the refugee problem but had continuously retained a vital and indispensable role as the provider of educational, training, health and relief services to Palestinian refugees. It would inevitably remain in that role until the problem of those refugees and the question of Palestine were settled in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions and, in the case of Israel, in the interests of land for peace.

25. **Mr. Xie** Yanbing (China) said that UNRWA had been crucial in improving the situation of Palestinian refugees, including their economic development and capacity-building, and it had achieved a great deal. Indeed, it had become the symbol of the international community's commitment to the welfare of the Palestinian refugees, and its staff should be commended on their dedication and spirit of sacrifice in often difficult and dangerous conditions.

25. For many years, a shortage of funds had been one of the Agency's main problems and the quality of its services had suffered. His delegation hoped that the international community would honour its commitment to UNRWA and increase its financial contributions.

26. Since the beginning of 2005, the situation in the Middle East had eased. New leaders had been elected in Israel and the national and municipal elections in Palestine, and, in Sharm-el-Sheikh, representatives of both sides had concluded a ceasefire agreement, while Israel had completed its partial withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and the West Bank ahead of schedule. Both sides should seize that unique opportunity to overcome difficulties, build mutual trust and return to the path outlined in the Road Map. As a permanent member of the Security Council, China had always promoted the peace process in the Middle East and engaged in mediation of various kinds. An early, complete and just solution to the Middle East problem was the common aspiration of the people of the region. It was also in the interests of world peace and stability.

27. **Mr. Noroozbaly** (Malaysia), referring to the statement by the Commissioner-General, which had presented a disheartening picture of the situation of the Palestine refugees, who were among the poorest and the most vulnerable as Israeli aggression had continued apace Israel to desist from destroying Palestinian homes and property and to ensure that the deteriorating humanitarian and socio-economic conditions in the occupied Palestinian territory were immediately reversed. The separation wall built by Israel and the accompanying restrictions that had been imposed had only aggravated conditions in the territory, denying the population access to employment and essential goods and services, and, moreover, impeding the freedom of movement of UNRWA staff. It urged continued to flout the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice regarding the building of the wall. The difficulties would only worsen.

28. His delegation had only admiration for the resolute and effective response of UNRWA staff members to the continuing emergency humanitarian situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, even as they laboured under extreme constraints. The deliberate killing of over 80 of the Agency's staff members during the reporting period was a matter of concern for it violated the integrity of the United Nations and the immunity and security of its humanitarian staff.

29. UNRWA was delivering effective emergency assistance to the refugees and reporting periodically to donor countries on how the programme was progressing. The steps taken to improve coordination in the response to emergency situations ought to produce the desired results. The Agency's cooperation with other United Nations agencies had improved the quality of life of Palestine refugees. The non-governmental organizations had also played a crucial role, in particular the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Palestinian Red Crescent Society.

30. Contributions to the regular budget of UNRWA should grow at a steady and predictable rate, and its emergency appeals for funds should be heeded if the Agency was to be able to respond adequately to the vital needs of the Palestine refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, the Syrian Arab Republic and the occupied Palestinian territory. The level of response had stagnated, however. Even though the wholesale destruction of homes by the occupying Power was contrary to international humanitarian law, it would be ironic if donors, to the detriment of the victims, stood on a position of principle that by funding the construction of new homes they would be complicit in those violations. By providing educational and health and social services to the refugees and improving their economic condition, UNRWA had done much to humanize the lives of the refugees and forestall a more alarming humanitarian disaster. Its activities were an essential component in the struggle for peace in the Middle East and were a tangible expression of the concern, sympathy and humanitarian commitment of the international community. The Agency must be given the collective support it needed to fulfil its essential mandate effectively until such time as the question of Palestine was resolved in its entirety.

31. **Mr. Nguyen Duy Chien** (Viet Nam) expressed high appreciation to UNRWA for its work over the past year in providing educational, health and social services and microcredit assistance to Palestine refugees. The Agency had also maintained or strengthened its cooperation with a number of other United Nations programmes and organizations. The Agency was, indeed, the symbol of the international community's commitment to the well-being of the Palestine refugees until a just and durable settlement of the refugee problem was achieved.

32. The Agency's activities had, however, been seriously affected by the instability and violence in the

region, and especially by Israeli military operations, which involved internal and external curfews and closures. UNRWA had been hampered in its humanitarian work because of the restrictions on the freedom of movement of its personnel and vehicles, that in turn had severely affected the daily lives of the refugees, who had lost access to income and essential goods and services. The detention of UNRWA staff in violation of the privileges and immunities of United Nations personnel was a matter of particular concern.

34. **Ms. Brooker** (United Kingdom), speaking on behalf of the European Union, the acceding countries Bulgaria and Romania, the candidate countries Croatia and Turkey, the stabilization and association process countries Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Montenegro and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and, in addition, the Republic of Moldova, commended the staff and management of UNRWA for fulfilling their duties in difficult and often very dangerous circumstances. She also expressed appreciation to the Governments of Jordan, Lebanon and Syria for having provided assistance to Palestinian refugees for more than five decades. With contributions of over €200 million in 2005 from the European Commission and member States, the European Union, the largest contributor to UNRWA, had provided more than half of the Agency's revenues and it planned to increase its support to Palestinian refugees throughout the region. It was important to revitalize the Advisory Commission.

35. The European Union was deeply concerned about the continuing humanitarian crisis in the occupied Palestinian territory and called on the Israeli Government to cease demolitions and to take urgent action to alleviate the suffering of Palestinians in line with international law and Security Council resolution 1544 (2004). The situation of Palestinian refugee children was particularly alarming and the Israeli Government and the Palestinian Authority should give children special protection and implement their obligations in that regard. The Israeli Government should avoid all action that aggravated the humanitarian and economic plight of the Palestinian people and take immediate measures under the Road Map to improve the security, humanitarian and economic conditions of the Palestinian people. The situation on the ground had hampered the capability of all humanitarian operators, including UNRWA and other United Nations agencies, to provide essential services. The Government of Israel should ensure full and secure access for diplomatic and humanitarian personnel and goods as required by international humanitarian law and the Road Map. The kidnapping of international and Palestinian aid workers was a matter of concern. The Palestinian Authority should ensure the safety of all foreign aid workers in Palestine.

36. The Agency's services to the refugees constituted an essential investment. UNRWA had developed a microfinance and microenterprise programme and a range of infrastructure projects to improve the living conditions of the refugees. Its medium-term plan focused on areas that were crucial to stability and mapped out its priorities. The Agency's relief and social services programme addressed the needs of the most vulnerable among the refugee population. In view of the financing gap in the UNRWA emergency programmes, the Commissioner-General's efforts to enlarge the donor community were appropriate. Future European Union assistance to the Palestinian Authority would reflect the priorities set out in its three-year medium-term development plan.

37. Israel's disengagement had been a significant step towards implementing the Road Map. The outstanding issues should be resolved, in particular those relating to the economic viability of Gaza. It was important to reach agreement on access to Gaza for people and goods through land borders, a port and an airport. The European Union condemned acts of violence perpetrated by Palestinian militants and encouraged the Palestinian Authority to continue to take action against those responsible and to take steps to control security in the Gaza Strip. Israel was entitled to protect its citizens against terrorist attacks, but it should act with restraint and refrain from extrajudicial killings, which were contrary to international law. It should also reverse its settlement policy and freeze all settlement activity, dismantle outposts erected since March 2001 and end the confiscation of land and the construction of the separation barrier, all of which threatened to render the two-State solution impossible to implement. The building of settlements and the construction of the separation barrier in and around East Jerusalem jeopardized a final status agreement on Jerusalem.

38. The European Union was committed to a negotiated two-State solution agreed between the parties, that would result in a viable, contiguous, sovereign and independent Palestinian State existing

side by side with Israel in peace and security. It would not recognize any changes to the pre-1967 borders other than those agreed upon between the parties, and it reaffirmed that the Road Map, as endorsed by the Security Council in resolution 1515 (2003), was the fundamental framework for a resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Until that conflict was resolved, the services provided by UNRWA would remain essential.

38. **Mr. Al-Qahtani** (Qatar) said that UNRWA should continue to provide essential humanitarian services to alleviate the suffering of the Palestinian refugees until such time as their situation was justly resolved in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III). The difficulties and hardships which had an adverse affect on the Agency's ability to deliver those services were copiously illustrated in the report of the Commissioner-General of UNRWA (A/60/13). Previous speakers had already spoken at length about the worsening humanitarian crisis and the effect of Israeli violations and practices in the occupied Palestinian territories. He reaffirmed his country's support for UNRWA staff in responding to the emergency humanitarian needs of Palestinian refugees and said that the Government of Israel should fully respect the immunities and privileges of UNRWA as a United Nations agency, as well as its own agreement with UNRWA. He also expressed his appreciation to those countries which were hosting Palestinian refugee camps, namely Jordan, the Syrian Arab Republic and Lebanon.

39. There should be a constant and predictable increase in the contributions to the Agency's regular budget; that was vital in order to ensure the care of refugees in its areas of operation. Moreover, every effort should be made by donor States, in particular, to step up their contributions to the emergency programmes run by the Agency, which should also seek new options for broadening its donor base. For its part, Qatar would continue to support the Agency's regular budget and to provide humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian people in general. It also maintained its firmly held view concerning the legal basis for the settlement of the issue of the Palestinian refugees, namely the implementation of the relevant United Nations resolutions, in particular General Assembly resolution 194 (III), which would prepare the way for the establishment of peace and stability in the region.

40. **Ms. Seeley** (United States of America) said that, through its substantial financial contributions to UNRWA, the United States had demonstrated its enduring support for providing humanitarian relief to Palestinian refugees. The United States was the largest single contributor to UNRWA after the European Union. The Agency's humanitarian assistance was a stabilizing force in the region, and other countries, especially those in the region, should increase their contributions to its core budget. UNRWA had a key role to play in supporting economic recovery and development in Gaza and the West Bank.

41. The United States welcomed the high-level international conference held in Geneva in 2004 that had reviewed the Agency's operations. It also commended UNRWA for having consigned the Working Group on Stakeholder Relations to examine ways of improving communication among the Agency, the States hosting refugees and donors. It supported the expansion of the Advisory Commission proposed by Sweden. The enlarged Advisory Commission could advise the Commissioner-General and her staff on matters related to the budget, special projects, fund-raising and accountability. The Fourth Committee should continue to streamline resolutions related to the financial requirements of UNRWA and the needs of the Palestinian refugees, and the General Assembly should expedite the clustering of items, biennializing and triennializing them where possible. Her delegation believed that it was unnecessary to adopt additional resolutions on UNRWA at the present juncture.

42. **Mr. Kanaan** (Observer for the Organization of the Islamic Conference) commended the staff of UNRWA for their devoted and valuable work in very difficult and dangerous circumstances. The humanitarian crisis in the occupied Palestinian territory was mounting as a result of the military operations waged by the Israeli occupation forces against the Palestinian people and the severe and sustained restrictions and curfews imposed on Palestinian cities and villages. The serious impact of such practices on the Palestinian economy was exacerbated by the widespread destruction of infrastructure and public and private buildings and by the imposition of harsher closures. In total disregard of its obligations under international humanitarian law, the privileges and immunities of UNRWA as an organ of the United Nations and a bilateral agreement with UNRWA to facilitate the Agency's operations at all times, Israel

continued to restrict the movement of UNRWA personnel, vehicles and goods, thereby impeding the Agency's provision of services and humanitarian assistance to Palestine refugees in the West Bank and Gaza. He urged the international community to exert pressure on the Israeli Government to lift those restrictions in order to enable UNRWA to implement its emergency relief and regular programmes.

43. Since September 2000, Israel had been ruthlessly and unlawfully destroying homes and refugee shelters in the occupied Palestinian territory, rendering thousands of people homeless. To assist the Palestinian people in rebuilding what Israel had destroyed, Saudi Arabia had, earlier in 2005, announced a $20 million donation for the construction of over 700 new homes in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip, while a $27 million donation from the United Arab Emirates Red Crescent Society had enabled UNRWA to undertake reconstruction in the Jenin refugee camp, which had been razed to the ground in 2002, despite frequent incursions, curfews, closures and the killing of the project's manager by Israeli forces.

44. In defiance of the advisory opinion issued by the International Court of Justice on 9 July 2004 and General Assembly resolution ES-10/15 of 20 July 2004, Israel continued to build the apartheid wall in the West Bank and in and around East Jerusalem. According to UNRWA, the wall had led to the further impoverishment and isolation of refugee families and created new obstacles to the delivery of essential UNRWA services to the refugees, who were cut off from agricultural land, places of work, and health, educational and other service centres.

45. According to the UNRWA Emergency Appeal 2005 Special Report, the Israeli withdrawal from Gaza would probably have little immediate impact on local socio-economic conditions and the majority of the population would continue to need substantial external assistance. Yet the response of the international community to the Agency's appeals for funds for emergency programmes had gradually decreased. It was therefore necessary for the international community to contribute generously to the Agency's budget and emergency relief programmes. The Agency had been able to continue its operations over the past five decades mainly because of the generous assistance of the donor countries and the support provided by the host countries, namely Jordan, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic, and the Palestinian Authority. It was incumbent upon the international community to exert efforts to revive the peace process and to compel Israel to return to the negotiating table. Until such time as the Israeli occupation of Palestinian and Arab territories came to an end and the refugee problem was solved in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions, the responsibility of UNRWA towards the Palestinian refugees should continue.

46. **Ms. Shawwa** (Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East) thanked the members of the Committee for supporting UNRWA and pointed out that, while the Arab States did not contribute much to the Agency's budget, they made substantial donations to its projects and provided about 25 per cent of the resources of the emergency fund.

47. **Ms. Barghouti** (Observer for Palestine), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that the statement by the representative of Israel had been full of distortions. Blaming the victims, themselves, UNRWA and Palestinian terrorists, his statement seemed to be aimed at absolving Israel of all responsibility for the plight of Palestinian refugees. It was indicative of Israel's denial of the humanitarian, historical, legal and political dimensions of the problem. The danger of such arguments lay in Israel's refusal to acknowledge its responsibility. That acknowledgement was the starting point for any solution to the refugee problem. Israel failed to recognize its moral, legal and financial responsibility in spite of an international consensus and the relevant General Assembly resolutions. The enormity of the problem was due to Israeli intransigence. The facts on the ground were well known and described in the UNRWA report.

48. Moreover, referring to the representative of Israel's claim that Israel was no longer in Gaza, he pointed out, first, that not all refugees lived in Gaza and, second, that although Israel had dismantled the illegal settlements and left Gaza, the area was still an occupied territory. Israel had left it after 37 years of destruction and it would take a long time to rehabilitate and reconstruct it. Israel denied that Gaza was still under its responsibility and under occupation; it was however, part of the occupied Palestinian territory and the status of refugees in Gaza remained the same. Legally it made no difference whether Israeli tanks were inside the refugee camps or around them. The responsibility of Israel as the occupying Power